

## Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden, 1899

*This famous poem, written by Britain's imperial poet, was a response to the American take over of the Phillipines after the Spanish-American War. Many modern readers find the message of this poem so repugnant, that there is still an ongoing discussion about the question whether Kipling might have actually written it as a satire.*

Take up the White Man's burden--  
Send forth the best ye breed--  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild--  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
In patience to abide,  
To veil the threat of terror  
And check the show of pride;  
By open speech and simple,  
An hundred times made plain  
To seek another's profit,  
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
The savage wars of peace--  
Fill full the mouth of Famine  
And bid the sickness cease;  
And when your goal is nearest  
The end for others sought,  
Watch sloth and heathen Folly  
Bring all your hopes to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
No tawdry rule of kings,  
But toil of serf and sweeper--  
The tale of common things.

The ports ye shall not enter,  
The roads ye shall not tread,  
Go mark them with your living,  
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
And reap his old reward:  
The blame of those ye better,  
The hate of those ye guard--  
The cry of hosts ye humour  
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:--  
"Why brought he us from bondage,  
Our loved Egyptian night?"

Take up the White Man's burden--  
Ye dare not stoop to less--  
Nor call too loud on Freedom  
To cloak your weariness;  
By all ye cry or whisper,  
By all ye leave or do,  
The silent, sullen peoples  
Shall weigh your gods and you.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
Have done with childish days--  
The lightly proffered laurel, (1)  
The easy, ungrudged praise.  
Comes now, to search your manhood  
Through all the thankless years  
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,  
The judgment of your peers!

*(1) Since the days of Classical Greece, a laurel wreath has been a symbolic victory prize.*

### Tasks:

- **Read the poem.** There will be a lot of **unfamiliar words and expressions**, many of which you will have to look up in a dictionary. When looking for the correct meaning, always **consider the context**.
- **Mark passages** that answer the following questions: **What** does the White Man need to do? **Why** does he need to do it? What are **the rewards** for the White Man?
- **Explain Kipling's understanding** of the White Man's burden in your own words..
- **Make notes:** How is the White Man **characterised** in the poem? How are the other 'peoples' characterised?
- **Do you think this poem is a satire?** Why? / Why not?